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# USAID'S ASSISTANCE TO THE MEDIA SECTOR IN AFGHANISTAN



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# USAID'S ASSISTANCE TO THE MEDIA SECTOR IN AFGHANISTAN

**Colin Soloway**

Management Systems International

**Abubaker Saddique**

Management Systems International

Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of USAID.

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# Preface

**L**ike all authoritarian governments, the Taliban regime that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 exercised tight control over the print and broadcast media, using state-owned media to indoctrinate people and mobilize support for its Islamic ideology. With the fall of the regime, the Afghan media scene started changing. The new government liberalized media laws and regulations to allow broadcasting by private sector and civil society organizations. It also abolished rigid censorship, although warlords in some regions continue to influence the operation of local media. As a result of the newly gained freedom, Afghanistan's independent print and electronic media have been growing.

Since October 2001, USAID has supported a wide range of media activities to aid the transition and lay the foundation for independent and responsible media. The Agency provided technical and commodity assistance to the government-owned Radio Afghanistan and trained journalists working in its regional offices.

USAID also entered into a cooperative agreement with Internews to promote independent community and commercial radio stations. In addition to providing FM transmitters, desktop computers with digital editing software, digital

recorders, microphones, and—occasionally—building materials for newly established community radio stations, Internews arranges training for station managers and operators. Internews also produces and distributes programs on issues ranging from education, health, the elections, daily news, and human rights for relay by assisted radio stations.

USAID has also helped to establish Arman, the first, private, independent FM radio station in the national capital. The station's staff of 25 includes eight women, who host most of its shows.

The Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) contracted Management Systems International (MSI) to send an evaluation team to Afghanistan to assess USAID media assistance programs. The team conducted extensive fieldwork in Afghanistan, interviewing USAID and Afghan officials, managers and journalists of community radio stations, Afghan journalists, and members of the civil society. The team examined the nature of USAID-supported media assistance programs, their strengths and shortcomings, and their impact on independent radio stations in Afghanistan. This report presents their main findings and recommendations.

Krishna Kumar  
Senior Social Scientist

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# Abbreviations

ACS	Afghans for Civil Society
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIA	Bakhtar Information Agency
BMC	Baltic Media Center
DG	democracy and governance
DHSA	Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
GMA	Good Morning Afghanistan
IBB	International Broadcasting Bureau
IGO	intergovernmental organization
IWPR	Institute for War and Peace Reporting
KMG	Killid Media Group
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID)
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
PSA	public service announcement
RA	Radio Afghanistan
RKK	Radio Killid Kabul
RTA	Radio-Television Afghanistan
VOA	Voice of America



# Executive Summary and Recommendations

Decimated by decades of civil war, extreme poverty, illiteracy, and authoritarian rule, Afghanistan in December 2002 presented a daunting challenge for donors and organizations seeking to promote a free and open media. Though faced with near insurmountable obstacles—both logistical and conceptual—USAID and the NGO implementing partner Internews managed to create, virtually from scratch, the beginnings of a radio industry and cultivate a fledgling cadre of journalists.

In December 2002 in Afghanistan, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) had no alternative media outlets

OTI soon realized that much of the state broadcasting bureaucracy was resistant to advice or training. A bolder strategy was required, and OTI decided to start at the grassroots. The office helped launch community radio stations and assisted the production of quality current affairs programming aimed at a national audience. To break the monopoly of the moribund state broadcaster, OTI supported a countrywide commercial radio station with an attractive music format.

It is too early to assess the full impact of media development efforts undertaken since February 2002, given the short timeframe and the absence of reliable audience surveys. Nevertheless, OTI and Internews deserve credit for adopting an innovative, cost-effective approach to media assistance that helped open up civic life in towns and villages across the country, while planting the seeds for Afghanistan's first commercial radio market. Emphasizing sustainability and quality programming, OTI and Internews appear to have avoided pitfalls that have plagued projects in other postconflict settings. Internews carefully chose aid recipients, stipulated that the aid would be phased out, and organized training courses relating to core editorial and management skills.

The main pillar of the assistance effort has been a loose network of community radio stations where journalists and business managers receive training,

**OTI helped launch community radio stations and assisted the production of quality current affairs programming aimed at a national audience.**

to work with.<sup>1</sup> With tribal and regional leaders due to convene to agree on a new interim government and the terms of a new constitution, OTI provided assistance to the state-run Radio Afghanistan to help inform Afghans about the latest political developments.

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1994, OTI provides fast, flexible, short-term assistance to countries experiencing a political transition or emerging from civil conflict. Its programs are tailored to country-specific needs and limited in duration—usually two to three years.

**The community radio stations may sound amateurish at times, but they have helped raise community issues for public debate for the first time and held local authorities accountable.**

equipment, and a relatively modest level of funding. The network was launched February 2003 with a \$327,897 grant from OTI. A subsequent grant was awarded to expand the network, which, by November 2004, had 25 community stations with a potential audience of 7.47 million Afghans, or 36 percent of the population. It is hoped that plans to add an AM component to the network will not prove too ambitious or burdensome for the stations.

The community radio stations may sound amateurish at times, but they have helped raise community issues for public debate for the first time and held local authorities accountable. Other stations have provided an unprecedented arena for discussion of social concerns and formerly taboo women's issues, including forced marriage and domestic violence.

OTI has also supported the production at several studio centers of quality current affairs and news programming that reached a national audience. OTI also supported the creation of an independent news agency that produced copy used by the community stations and helped fund training initiatives and journalism seminars, including a program that tries to bring journalism education to universities.

The second pillar of OTI's strategy was the launch of a private station, Radio

Arman FM, which went on air in Kabul in March 2003, and was designed to act as a model and catalyst for establishing a commercial media market. Radio Arman FM succeeded in ending the state broadcast monopoly and fostering a nascent media advertising market, the first in the country's history. The station, owned by a consortium of Afghan-Australian entrepreneurs, had substantial advertising revenues and attracted a large audience with its Hindi, Iranian, and Afghan music format. It received an initial OTI grant in 2003 and a second grant in early 2004. OTI also provided approximately \$2.12 million to owners of Radio Arman to start a commercial television station in Kabul in October 2004.

Although the Radio Arman project met its goal of laying the foundation for commercial broadcasting, the station plays no journalistic or public role beyond broadcasting pleasing music. In hindsight, it is regrettable that the original grant failed to require the station to air more current affairs and news programming. The assessment team believes that USAID should carefully examine further assistance to the station's owners to ensure that other U.S.-funded projects are not undermined. U.S. assistance to Radio Arman and its new television station should include specific obligations to carry a significant amount

of quality current affairs and news programming.

While OTI's media assistance effort appears to have been carefully planned and considered, legal issues were left out of the strategy. USAID's worthy investment could be lost unless there is reform of Afghanistan's arbitrary legal and regulatory framework. The team recommends initiatives that would open up debate on media law and assist journalists, lawyers, and civic activists to safeguard freedom of expression and address threats to journalistic inquiry. Neglecting legal and regulatory issues carries unacceptable risks for U.S.-funded media projects and, above all, for Afghanistan's democratic evolution.

Apart from legal issues, the future of USAID's media development effort will be shaped by Afghanistan's weak economy, the level of international reconstruction aid, persistent threats to security, and other unpredictable factors. Yet one important challenge involves communicating an understanding within the U.S. bureaucracy about the role and nature of media development work. OTI and Internews have found that well-intentioned representatives from other U.S. Government departments and agencies sometimes view stations receiving U.S. funding as platforms for information operations and public persuasion.

The purpose of media development needs to be clarified and appreciated throughout the U.S. Government as a distinct, legitimate endeavor, one separate from public diplomacy or public affairs activities. An underlying assumption of media assistance is that recipients will be free of editorial control from

donors. Media outlets that receive such aid—in Afghanistan and elsewhere—embrace U.S. principles of free speech and see them as a sacred promise that U.S. Government funding comes with no conditions of censorship or propaganda. Failure to distinguish between media development and persuasion campaigns can feed apprehension and suspicion about the sincerity of U.S. intentions.

## Lessons Learned

### **1. Successful media development efforts begin with a solid understanding of the conditions of a particular society and its media sector.**

Standards of journalism may be the same all over the world, but the educational, financial, cultural, and regulatory contexts vary from country to country. In a state as underdeveloped and traumatized as Afghanistan, media assistance models from the former Soviet Union or the Balkans could not be easily transplanted.

Organizers of U.S. assistance quickly grasped the difficulties and conditions prevailing in Afghanistan and launched an appropriate grassroots radio project. The decentralized community radio model employed in sub-Saharan Africa proved more relevant for Afghanistan than approaches in more developed environments. In addition, OTI and Internews chose to jumpstart a commercial broadcasting market through one dynamic, well-organized venture instead of a myriad of competing commercial activities. The Internews community network should be studied as a model

**The Internews community network should be studied as a model for media development and treated as an option in underdeveloped settings.**

for media development and treated as an option in underdeveloped settings.

### **2. Along with training and financial viability, legal reform should be taken into account from the beginning of media assistance efforts.**

OTI and Internews applied some important lessons from assistance efforts elsewhere. The emphasis on financial viability built into the community radio project and other activities is encouraging and appears to have achieved partial success. Unfortunately, the third pillar of successful media development—a legal enabling environment—has been almost entirely neglected, potentially at great cost. Despite approximately \$15 million invested in the development of free and independent media in Afghanistan, little has been done to create a legal and regulatory environment that protects that investment.

USAID should make the reform of media legislation a top priority. This effort should promote the creation of an independent body—similar to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)—to regulate broadcast licensing and international principles for programming. As an initial goal, legal reform efforts should seek to cancel provisions requiring print media to obtain licenses, and libel and slander should be decriminalized. On occasion, OTI has

argued that such legal, regulatory—and perhaps constitutional—reform is beyond its mandate and more rightly the responsibility of USAID’s Office of Democracy and Governance. But neglecting the factors that govern the media’s relationship with government renders independent media and U.S. program funding hostages to fortune. Given the elaborate and admirable media assistance work underway in Afghanistan, ignoring legal reform seems to pose an unacceptable risk.

### **3. The terms of direct grants to commercial media ventures need to be reconsidered.**

The experience of Radio Arman FM illustrates that providing support to purely commercial media can build up media and business markets more swiftly than NGO or community media can. That being said, such commercial outlets in an unregulated environment can prove counterproductive to the overall media development goals. Large commercial projects can vacuum up available advertising revenue in their quest to dominate the market, possibly driving out struggling stations that have stronger editorial missions to inform citizens. In an independent media “nursery” such as Afghanistan, community and public service stations such as the Internews network are perhaps not strong enough to go head-to-head

immediately with a station such as Radio Arman. Should USAID subsidize media that perform an extremely limited public service and threaten the survival of more public-oriented projects? Future grants should include clearly defined requirements for news and information programming and real consequences if such requirements are not met.

#### **4. From the beginning of assistance efforts, baseline audience and opinion surveys and media monitoring projects should be encouraged.**

Almost all the estimates of broadcast media audience ratings in Afghanistan are based on anecdotal evidence or limited surveys of questionable accuracy and methodology. In any initial media development package, OTI should include funds for studies—or capacity building for baseline studies—to determine audience share for media outlets and help set program priorities. Such efforts should have been launched from the outset.

#### **5. U.S. agencies need to agree to and abide by clear guidelines and shared concepts about the intended role of OTI's media development projects.**

In a postwar, high-priority mission such as Afghanistan, there are inevitable pressures on the departments of State and Defense to produce results via information operations, including products of public affairs and psychological operations. It only natural for these departments to regard OTI's media development projects as useful and

logical platforms for such products and for them to seek to support and exploit those platforms. However, in an environment such as Afghanistan—where there is suspicion of U.S. intentions and confusion about the roles of military, intelligence, and development agencies—such an approach can put aid recipients at risk and jeopardize the emergence of a robust media sector.

Media development and public persuasion are distinct endeavors that need to be kept separate to be effective. To this end, the authors recommend a series of in-depth, interagency discussions, mediated by the State Department's Office for the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization and the National Security Council, to establish a common understanding of the respective roles of media development and information operations.

# Introduction

## Afghanistan's History and Recent Past

For thousands of years, the region that is now Afghanistan was home to some of the world's oldest human civilizations and cultures. As a Central Asian transit connection and east-west trade link, the region belonged to great empires and was subjected to frequent armed conflict.

**In 1964, the king gave the country a democratic constitutional system that permitted an independent press for the first time.**

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Mughal Empire of India and the Safavid Empire of Persia held parts of Afghanistan. Persia controlled the province of Herat, while the Mughals administered Kabul. Khandahar Province changed hands between the empires. By the mid-18th century, under the leadership of Ahmed Shah Durrani, Afghanistan had invaded the Persian Empire and formed one of the largest empires in the region.

Following the death of Ahmed Shah in 1772, a century of internal squabbling, and two large-scale invasions by the British, the country became a buffer between imperial Britain and czarist Russia. Afghanistan's current borders

were determined by this imperial rivalry. The late 19th-century Afghan suzerain, Amir Abdul Rehman Khan, gave the country a centralized structure by forming alliances and forcefully suppressing insurgencies.

## Independence, Neutrality, and a "Decade of Democracy"

In 1919, after the third Anglo-Afghan war, Afghanistan won its sovereignty and became the first independent Muslim country under the reformist King Amanullah Khan. He gave Afghanistan its first constitution and moved the predominantly tribal nation toward revolutionary reforms. Mehmud Tarzi, the king's mentor and father-in-law, was inspired by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to found the nation's first newspaper, *Siraj-ul-Akhbar*.

Over the next few decades, Afghanistan remained largely neutral in global politics. During the rein of King Muhammad Zahir Shah (1933–73), the country enjoyed its most peaceful and relatively prosperous period in modern history. Afghanistan was again a buffer on the international stage, playing off both superpowers in the Cold War. The global rivalry attracted substantial international assistance for Afghanistan, improving its infrastructure and economy. In 1964, the king gave the country a democratic constitutional system that permitted an independent press for the first time.



A relatively progressive press law was adopted during the “decade of democracy” (1964–73), seen as golden years when a degree of cultural and press freedom emerged. Although Afghanistan had no independent radio or television station, a more open tone emerged on state broadcasting. Print media began to blossom, and independent newspapers were established in Kabul and other major cities. Publications (mostly affiliated with various ideologies and political groups) showed a strong sense of independence by questioning and criticizing, and they shaped government policies.

The taste of freedom was short-lived. In 1973 the king’s cousin, Sardar Daud Khan, assumed power in a bloodless coup, and all nongovernmental newspapers and political parties were suspended. The new president’s main achievement was establishing television in Afghanistan, though broadcasts did not begin until a communist government assumed power after a violent coup in April 1978.

### **Communist Rule and the Fall of the Taliban**

The communists quickly moved toward a one-party dictatorship by eliminating all potential opposition. The state media was employed for explicit, extensive propaganda, and independent media ceased to exist. The regime’s ill-conceived social and economic reforms alienated people and sometimes inspired violent revolts. After the 1979 Soviet invasion, opposition to communist rule and Soviet influence evolved into a national struggle for Afghan independence. Though the invasion crushed any prospect of media freedom, it brought technical improvements to the broadcasting infrastructure.

Some 16 radio stations broadcast locally produced programming under strict editorial control from central authorities. All major Afghan cities gained television stations, though programming content was tightly restricted.

During the decade of Soviet occupation, millions of Afghans were forced into exile. In Pakistani cities—in particular, Peshawar—an Afghan press in exile took shape. Most anticommunist, Islamic militant, Mujahideen resistance groups had their own newspapers and magazines. Secular Afghan nationalists established other media organizations, but fundamentalist opponents assassinated some of these nationalists and others were hounded out of Pakistan.

This period also saw the increasing influence within Afghanistan and its refugee communities of international radio broadcasts in the Afghan languages of Pashto and Dari by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Germany’s Deutsche Welle. International radio services recruited and hired some of the most talented Afghan journalists and producers. Some of the most popular programming—such as the BBC’s Afghan soap opera *New Home, New Life*—attracted large Afghan audiences.

After the withdrawal of the Soviet military in 1989, the last three years of communist rule by Mohammad Najibullah Ahmadzai saw a relative improvement in press freedom. Some independent newspapers criticized government decisions and disclosed secret documents.

The government’s collapse and the failure of a UN-brokered peace plan

ushered in a civil war. In 1992–94, the country was plunged into anarchy, most of its infrastructure was decimated, and millions of Afghans fled. Warlords controlled regional radios and TV stations, employing them as propaganda tools. Afghan society was increasingly polarized, and most of the print media inside and outside the country allied itself with one or another faction.

In the mid-1990s, a new fundamentalist militia known as the Taliban emerged in the south. By 1996, it controlled most of Afghanistan, including the capital. However, the Taliban’s swift military victories never translated into international recognition or legitimacy because of the regime’s fanatical interpretation and enforcement of Islamic sharia law and its hosting of international terrorists. The Taliban banned women from working, attending school, or venturing outside without a male companion; forced all males to grow beards; and policed an extreme code of Islamic dress and behavior.

One of the regime’s first moves was to lock up the premises of the national television and ban all broadcasts. The TV building was used as a military barracks. In subsequent years, the regime became more draconian, brutally crushing journalism and free expression. Media freedom, already badly damaged under the Taliban’s predecessors, vanished. The regime placed the printed press—no more than 10 publications across Afghanistan—under strict regime control.

The Taliban renamed the state radio broadcasting system Radio Sharia. It was the regime’s main media outlet as well the country’s main internal media



system. Transmissions were broadcast to a large part of the country through a medium-wave transmitter in Kabul and relay stations and transmitters in various provincial cities. These carried both Kabul broadcasts and locally produced material. The equipment was reported to be old-fashioned and deteriorating. Most of these facilities were destroyed during the U.S.-led military intervention in late 2001.

Music had no place on Taliban airwaves. Afghanistan's sole radio station mostly aired religious programs and official propaganda. As one Afghan journalist told Reporters Sans Frontières in 2000: "In Radio Sharia, they put out 12 hours of programs every day with no journalistic content whatever and no songs. Sermons alternate with religious debates and propaganda in which they insult [deceased anti-Taliban resistance leader Ahmed Shah] Massud and the Americans."

Afghans taking risks listened to short-wave international broadcasts in Pashto and Dari. During the five years of Taliban rule, the BBC, VOA, Deutsche Welle, Radio Netherlands, Radio France International, Radio Tehran, Radio Pakistan, All India Radio, and national broadcasters in the Central Asian republics were major sources of broadcast information for most Afghans.

Although the Northern Alliance, the anti-Taliban opposition, operated a television station with three hours of telecasts daily, it probably reached no more than 500 television sets in the northeastern town of Faizabad. The Northern Alliance always claimed to have a fully equipped radio station ready to roll in a matter of weeks, but broadcasts never

materialized until the fall of the Taliban. Many exiled Afghan journalists in neighboring Pakistan and Iran somehow published modest newspapers, but they were unable to launch an independent radio station or produce quality programming for other stations.

Within a few months of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States, a U.S.-led military intervention toppled the Taliban regime. On December 5, most of the anti-Taliban opposition groups signed a UN-sponsored peace plan in Bonn, Germany, which paved the way for Afghanistan's political transition. The first post-Taliban transitional government assumed power on December 22, 2001.

Since then, international donors and the new Afghan leadership have launched reconstruction and development programs. The October 9, 2004, presidential election went ahead peacefully, with high voter turnout and a widespread acceptance of the election results. The parliamentary elections in the spring of 2005 will mark another crucial step toward fulfilling the main points outlined by the Bonn Agreement.

### **Country Conditions, 2002–04**

Decades of armed conflict and anarchic conditions traumatized Afghan society, resulting in severe levels of poverty, poor sanitation, and one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Agriculture remains the main industry, though warfare and landmines have severely affected farming and reduced the amount of arable land. The biggest cash crop is the opium poppy, a problem that international donors and the new leadership are struggling to address.

In 2002, Afghanistan ranked 169 out of 174 countries in the UN Development Programme's Human Development Index. That year, no more than 30 percent of Afghans could read and write, only one household in 1,000 had a telephone connection, and only 4 percent of the population had access to electricity.

Warfare and the exodus of refugees have not altered the country's ethnic composition or regional distribution. The Tajik community resides mainly around Herat and in the northeast; Uzbeks live primarily in the north; and nomadic Turkmen live along the border with Turkmenistan; Hazaras, of Mongolian origin, live in the central mountains; and Baluchis live in the extreme south. In the east and south, Pashtuns form the majority and are the country's most numerous ethnic community. The country's primary languages are Pashto (Afghan), Dari (Afghan Farsi), and various Turkic dialects. Nearly the whole population is of the Islamic faith, and the vast majority identify themselves as Sunni Muslims. A minority—mainly Hazaras—are Shiite Muslims.



# USAID's Evolving Media Strategy

## Responding to Urgent Needs

When OTI arrived on the ground in the winter of 2001–02, Afghanistan's media sector was reawakening from five and a half years of Taliban repression. Independent and political party newspapers were quick to respond to a population eager for news and information. The victorious Northern Alliance swiftly took control of the dormant, state-run Radio Television Afghanistan, which began broadcasting a generally pro-Tajik message designed to

on rapid training and dissemination of information via the existing, state-controlled media. Noting the failure of state-run media to either reform or produce any quality programming, OTI's strategy shifted to the more familiar area of assisting and creating new media outlets outside state control.

OTI delivered assistance to print media, but concluded that the country's marginal literacy rate meant that most effective strategy would be the creation of an independent radio sector. In the early stages of drafting media development plans, OTI secured close cooperation and communication with implementing partners, which helped avoid duplication and the lack of coordination or coherence that media assistance has experienced in other countries.

OTI was not the only U.S. Government actor in media development in Afghanistan. The U.S. International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) and the Department of Defense were interested in developing the media sector in 2002. OTI sought to explain to other U.S. Government departments and actors that independent media are not a platform for psychological operations by the military or a political message board for the embassy. OTI and its implementing partners view media development as a strategic policy priority in and of itself; it is distinct from information operations or public diplomacy.

**In the early stages of drafting media development plans, OTI secured close cooperation and communication with implementing partners.**

glorify the warlord General Fahim and cement control of the government for the Tajik community. The new managers of state-controlled media, in the capital and the provinces, immediately resumed the familiar model of authoritarian media, seeking to command the masses and praise the relevant political authority.

Given the urgency in 2002 and early 2003 of getting information out to the public about the Loya Jirga (or emergency political meetings of tribal elders and regional leaders), OTI focused

## Policy Environment and Media Infrastructure

In 2002, without public comment or consultation, the Afghan Government adopted a media law to which journalists, international press freedom watchdog groups, and the media development community strongly objected. Based on a 1965 press law, the new law aimed at controlling the media through licensing and content restrictions.

President Hamid Karzai signed a revised law in March 2003 that improved on its predecessor, but the revised law is still more focussed on controlling than protecting the media. Article 19, the London-based NGO that focuses on media law, warned that numerous provisions of the legislation are in contravention of international standards for freedom of expression, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Afghanistan is a signatory.<sup>2</sup>

In May 2003, OTI funded a conference run by Article 19 to establish an independent journalists' union that would promote amending the media law. Unfortunately, the effort was not given sufficient logistical or political support. The project swiftly collapsed when Northern Alliance loyalists attempted to take over the union. Recommended changes to the law provided by Internews and the BBC World Service Trust to the Ministry of Information and Culture have been steadfastly rejected.

Despite its refusal to change the law, the ministry has been extremely accommodating to USAID-funded media projects. It has been willing to be flexible about the media licensing rules for a USAID-supported radio network and the commercial Radio Arman FM project, and has allowed stations to begin broadcasting before licenses have been issued. Even so, ministry and local officials throughout the country regularly harass and interfere with the operation of other independent media, often exploiting provisions of the current law.

OTI and Internews have pointed to the good relationship they maintain with the Ministry of Information and Culture, arguing that it is better to operate somewhat "under the radar" without confronting the authorities about legal issues. This approach may prove counterproductive, since the survival of independent media depends on an open regulatory and constitutional framework.

Persuading the ministry to accommodate worthy projects does not address the root of the problem. A new government or minister may not feel as benevolently toward the independent media, and control of the media will become a more important political issue as parliamentary elections and parliamentary politics come to the fore. There is no legal provision to prevent the ministry from shutting down all the media USAID helped to build with its \$15 million donation to Afghanistan media projects.

## Assistance to Radio Afghanistan

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Taliban and the establishment of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, OTI's short-term goals were to support the provision of news and information to Afghan citizens about the Emergency Loya Jirga to be held in June 2002. Though USAID policy is to support training, equipment, and programming to nongovernmental and commercial broadcast media and avoid providing direct support for state-controlled media organizations, no nonstate broadcast sector existed in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Any project designed to report on the Loya Jirga had to make use of the newly revived Radio Afghanistan (RA). The purpose of the Internews program was to enhance the Afghan media's ability to gather information and report it "in a clear, balanced manner to Afghan citizens amid a sensitive political transition."<sup>3</sup>

Most of OTI's assistance took the form of indirect aid to RA, emphasizing capacity building rather than direct subsidies. OTI granted Internews \$1,137,000 between February 2002 and February 2003 for a program that included hands-on broadcast journalism training for regional RA reporters,

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3 OTI's assistance goals were "to insure that postwar Afghan journalists will be better trained and equipped to assume their role as a key source of balanced news and information to the nation of Afghanistan; to identify, train and equip local Afghan journalists who are committed to providing balanced and accurate reporting; to ensure that a cadre of professional, well-trained Afghan journalists emerges, [and is] able to report effectively on political, economic, and social issues during the reconstruction and transitional period." USAID/OTI Media Grants in Afghanistan, October 2001–May 2004, Grant No. INT001.

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2 For Article 19's analysis of the 2004 law, see <[www.article19.org/docimages/1753.doc](http://www.article19.org/docimages/1753.doc)>.

equipment improvements, and technical support to regional stations.

The only equipment donated to RA in Kabul was a VSAT satellite communications system costing \$334,000, which allowed RA access to the internet and wider sources of international news and communications.<sup>4</sup> OTI also provided \$380,000 to purchase shortwave airtime for RA's nationwide and international coverage of the Loya Jirga<sup>5</sup> until IBB provided a 400-kW AM transmitter.

In addition to training and support activities for RA, OTI funded a number of projects that contributed—or at least were intended to contribute peripherally—to RA content and programming. Between November 2002 and June 2003, OTI provided \$82,000 to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) project of training 150 journalists from the state-controlled Bakhtar Information Agency (BIA), which provides most of the news copy broadcast on RA.<sup>6</sup> OTI also funded another \$54,000 IWPR project to train BIA and independent journalists covering the Constitutional Loya Jirga between November 2003 and January 2004.<sup>7</sup> During the Emergency Loya Jirga in 2002, OTI provided \$60,000 in technical support and expert guidance to the Loya Jirga Commission. This assistance helped produce public service announcements (PSAs) and information on the Loya Jirga process for broadcast on state radio and television.<sup>8</sup>

The only direct OTI subsidy for programming on RA was \$60,000 given to the Baltic Media Center (BMC) to produce a series of provincial radio talk shows on the constitutional process.<sup>9</sup> The shows were aired as part of Good Morning Afghanistan (GMA), an independent production organization that broadcasts news, public affairs, and features for an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon over RA frequencies.

GMA was created in February 2002 as part of BMC's goal to strengthen the state broadcaster, but negotiated its independent status when it became clear that RA was not likely to be reformed. GMA uses state airwaves, but maintains its independence in exchange for producing two hours daily of badly needed programming, at the expense of BMC and mostly European donors.

While OTI did not provide extensive funding to RA, other donors—including Britain, Germany, India, and Japan—contributed millions of dollars in training, equipment, and transmission capacity to the state radio and television broadcaster. In addition, IBB provided RA with a 400-kW AM transmitter funded by the Department of Defense. In exchange, IBB obtained an informal agreement with the government that allowed the bureau to install a second 400-kW transmitter for the transmission of VOA programming.<sup>10</sup>

## Outcomes of Assistance

Despite the investment in training and support by OTI and other donors, RA's performance remains far below international standards of professional journalism. It is firmly under government control, and is heavily overstaffed with editors, managers, and "journalists" who learned their trade under Soviet tutelage in the 1970s and '80s. RA's leadership usually show little interest in training staff or improving the editorial product. In the past, the suspicion of foreign training was so deep-seated that at least one official was fired for appearing to be too cooperative with Internews. RA management was so obstructive to foreign initiatives beyond its control that it refused to carry PSAs and information programming prepared by the government's own Loya Jirga Commission.<sup>11</sup>

RA management insisted that Internews train regional journalists in Kabul, not in the regions. Internews trained one or two journalists from each regional station for three weeks in the capital, but found that even those who appeared to grasp basic journalistic techniques faced old, Soviet-style editorial management when they returned to their newsrooms. Internews managers conceded that the model of sending a couple of journalists to Kabul for short-term training was insufficient to overcome the deficit

4 Grant No. RON 004 and RON 023.

5 Grant No. RON 003.

6 Grant No. RON 045.

7 Grant No. IOMAFG077.

8 Grant No. IOMKBL020.

9 Grant No. RON 091.

10 The large generator needed to power the transmitter was not included. The Asia Foundation purchased the generator and some fuel. The generator was delivered and turned on days before the election.

11 This obstruction during the Loya Jirga should be seen in the context of the power struggle between President Karzai and Defense Minister Fahim. In theory, Fahim served at Karzai's pleasure, but in fact he was the most powerful warlord in Kabul. Fahim's loyalists from the Panshir Valley swiftly filled RA payrolls even before broadcasting began. Fahim regarded the Loya Jirga and the concept of a nationally representative government as a potential challenge to his position as the conqueror of Kabul (with U.S. help) and arbiter of the spoils of governmental patronage.

in professional editorial skills. A better strategy might have been to combine Kabul-based training with longer-term use of Afghan trainers on the ground at regional stations. These trainers could have engaged directly with local editors and managers.

In addition, Internews acknowledged spending too much time teaching recording techniques and preproduction of news programming, when the tradition in Afghanistan is to rely almost entirely on live programming. The foreign trainers' misunderstanding of their students' capabilities may have come from a general lack of knowledge of conditions in Afghanistan. Even in other postconflict societies, trainers had not encountered such low levels of education and unfamiliarity with modern radio broadcasting technology. Nevertheless, training would have been much more successful if RA's leadership had

been genuinely interested in creating a professional journalistic organization.

As early as January 2002, the substantial difficulties in providing assistance to the state broadcasters were clear to OTI. Internews promptly shifted its focus toward building up independent radio. Work with the state media ceased with the termination of the project in February 2003. At that time, there was a clearer picture of where donor investment could reap dividends and where it might disappear into a moribund state bureaucracy.

The only professional programming broadcast on RA is the two-hour daily show produced by the independent GMA unit. Anecdotal reports suggest it is one of the most popular programs on the air in the country. However, GMA is not sustainable in its current format. Unable to solicit advertising and

dependent on donor funding, it may have to move to a private network to survive financially.

The state radio bureaucracy and attitudes of its leadership undermined journalist training and other support for RA. Many government officials and managers regard state media as a mechanism of control and political, ethnic, tribal, and family patronage, rather than a public service. Given this mentality; a lack of competition (until recently); and overly generous, unconditional financial aid from European and Japanese donors; the masters of RTA have no genuine incentive to improve their product, reform the station's operations, or cut back a bloated staff. The GMA Director Barry Salaam said that he employed a couple of former RA journalists, but it took more than a year to break them of old, authoritarian editorial habits.



# USAID Support to Community and Commercial Radio

## Background

Because Internews had only worked with existing media organizations in more developed countries, it found itself in unfamiliar territory in Afghanistan in 2002, where there was no independent broadcast media. Internews initially considered creating an independent national network that would broadcast centrally produced programming over a network of dozens of regional FM repeaters. This concept resembled projects undertaken elsewhere, including Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

**With OTI encouragement, Internews saw the benefits of a decentralized network of primarily community radio stations.**

Plans changed when, with OTI encouragement, Internews saw the benefits of a decentralized network of primarily community radio stations. This model had a number of advantages and was logistically more practical. Fueling and maintaining a generator and providing security for the transmitter site would have required an FM network with 50–60 repeaters, each manned for 24 hours. Further, in a country with tenuous transport links and vast poverty, local leaders and citizens would feel little stake in a repeater bringing news and

programming from a distant capital. By contrast, each community station needed to build a critical mass of local political and financial support to get on the air. This support would contribute to the security and political viability of the station and its transmitter.

More importantly, a decentralized, community-based network would provide local citizens with a forum for local news, announcements, public information, and dialogue on a range of relevant local issues relevant to a particular area. Such a dialogue would be a ground-breaking experiment for Afghanistan.

The community-based network would also provide a valuable platform for news and current affairs programming aimed at a countrywide audience. Since Afghans already had access to national news from the BBC, VOA, Radio Azadi, and other foreign broadcasters, the real value of the community-based network was the ability of local stations to sow the seeds of open debate, civil society, and democratization across the country.

## Types and Volume of Assistance

### Creation of Independent Commercial and Community Radio Stations

In February 2003, OTI granted Internews \$324,897 for the initial establishment, equipping, and training of 14

independent stations across Afghanistan. Radio Killid in Kabul (RKK) went on the air August 19. By the end of the year, it had been joined by other stations—in Jalalabad, Bamiyan, Logar, Pule Khumri, Herat, and Kandahar. By the end of the initial grant period in June 2004, eight more stations were on the air—in Qarabagh, Balkh, Mazar e Sharif, Khost, Kunduz, Ghor, Ghorïyan, and a second in Logar. With an additional grant from OTI for the establishment of 20 more stations through March 2005, Internews trained and equipped additional stations. By November 2004, the network had added 10 additional stations, and a total of 25 community FM broadcasters were reaching an estimated 7,475,000 Afghans, or 36 percent of the population.<sup>12</sup>

Internews based its selection of stations (or proposed stations) to assist on three main criteria: geography, potential audience, and, most importantly, an evaluation of the potential partner: the would-be station owner or manager. Given the importance of sustainability, Internews was reluctant to recruit potential station owners on its own, without clear conditions and criteria. Rather, Internews looked to individuals who not only wanted to run a community station but were motivated enough to seek out Internews and other NGOs to help them. Internews required that potential station owners or managers demonstrate community support, whether in the form of donations of land or housing for the station and transmitter or a local council's pledge to pay some expenses or license fees. Private station owners were

expected to invest as much as \$1,000 in capital.

The Internews definition of community radio remained flexible. Rather than simply being owned by the local council (and thus under political control), Internews permitted private or collective ownership if the station had strong community ties and support. Internews expected the station to serve the community by reporting on issues of local concern and inviting in community members as well as leaders to discuss local issues. As a result of its thoughtful, careful approach, Internews appears to have avoided the pitfalls of other media development efforts elsewhere, when ambiguous criteria have sometimes led to a poor selection of local partners.

So far, only one station—Radio Sharq in Jalalabad—is a purely commercial enterprise and serves as the owner's vehicle for advertising his businesses. Three women's stations—Radio Rabia e Balkhi in Mazar e Sharif, Radio Zohra in Kunduz, and Radio Sahar in Herat—were founded with initial financial support by the Canadian NGO IMPACS. Several other stations were set up by Afghan NGOs, including RKK, part of the Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan (DHSA) media conglomerate; and Radio Azad in Kandahar, founded by former National Public Radio correspondent Sarah Chayes and run by Afghans for Civil Society (ACS). All other stations are set up as community radio stations.

### **Training, Equipment, and Business Development Support**

Before a station goes on the air with its own content, its prospective staff come to Kabul for three weeks of basic

journalism and technical training at an Internews training center, which includes a "dummy" radio station for live training. When a station goes on the air, an instructor spends approximately 10 days with its managers and reporters to help them get started.

Internews also provides technical advice on building makeshift studio rooms from locally available materials such as cloth, cotton, cardboard, and staples. Internews also provides each new station with a "radio station in a box": cased racks of recorders, players, and amplifiers; a small mixing desk; and a computer loaded with the recording software CoolEdit Pro. Each new station also receives a package of microphones and portable tape recorders for reporting from the field, a 150-watt FM transmitter, a 30-meter tower, and a generator and solar panels to run the station and transmitter when there is no local power. All equipment remains the property of Internews.<sup>13</sup> The cost of the startup technical package is relatively modest, ranging from \$12,000 to \$70,000, depending on technical needs. For instance, a station on a mountain-top might not need a transmitter tower.

Internews returned to fund the creation of production rooms in some stations after their staff showed they were keen to produce more local programming. Startup costs include \$3,000 for six months of salaries—\$150 a month for a station director, \$100 for a general producer, and \$100 for a technical director and supplemental fuel and transport expenses. Internews stated that the startup

<sup>12</sup> The estimate is based on figures from Internews' *National Radio Frequency Survey*, 2nd edition <[www.internews.org/regions/afghanistan/National\\_Survey\\_AM\\_II\\_040930.pdf](http://www.internews.org/regions/afghanistan/National_Survey_AM_II_040930.pdf)>, and subsequent Internews briefings.

<sup>13</sup> Internews has the right to reclaim the equipment—a right it has not yet had to exercise.



cost of each station was approximately \$100,000. Over the past year, the running costs are approximately \$1,800 per month per station.

From the beginning, Internews makes clear that stations must cover their own operational expenses within as little as six months. Internews thus gives active advice and training in media and business management, and has had two fulltime foreign business development trainers on staff in Kabul since October 2004. These trainers help the network and individual stations develop rational, competitive advertising rate cards and pursue other sources of station revenue, such as paid requests and PSAs.

In addition, Internews started funding the position of advertising and business director for each station in September 2004. Individuals selected by the stations are sent to Kabul for training in advertising and business skills. After they return to their home stations, their salaries are paid by Internews for six months and they are given a commission of 12 percent on all advertising revenue they generate.

In September 2004, OTI provided a grant of \$170,000 in management and business training for RKK's staff, and Internews provided the radio station with a more powerful transmitter. As part of the larger Killid Media Group, RKK poses interesting problems. On one hand, the station appears to be reasonably well run, with quality programming and perhaps a 20 percent audience share in Kabul. All signs suggest a promising, profitable future. On the other, RKK is harnessed to badly performing parts of the Killid group: newspapers

and magazines that have little chance of turning a profit in a country with 30 percent literacy.

### **Production of National-Level Content: Tanin and Salaam Watandar**

In early 2003, OTI provided a grant of \$150,000 to Internews to fund the creation of a radio production unit in Kabul that would produce programming "on a range of topics to increase democratic awareness in Afghanistan."<sup>14</sup> The two main programs were *Ba Khabar* (*In the Know*), a weekly news and current affairs magazine program; and *Haqq-e-Chist* (*What Is My Right?*), a weekly program on human and constitutional rights. At the same time, OTI gave a grant of \$57,526 to AINA, a Franco-Afghan NGO, for the creation and production of 17 episodes of a weekly 30-minute talk show, *Myane Mah* (*Between Us*), with national news, culture, and entertainment spots.<sup>15</sup> Five months later, AINA received an additional \$59,237 for an additional six months of *Myane Mah* broadcasts.<sup>16</sup>

The Tanin (Echo) distribution network provides compact discs of these programs to state and emerging community radio stations around the country. Created in January 2003 by Internews and AINA, Tanin was funded jointly by OTI and the European Commission. It sends out as many as 34 separate programs a week produced by Internews, AINA, and other organizations. Programs vary from Internews' *Shahrak*

*Atfal* (*Children's City*) to AINA's *Dar Velayat, Tchi Migzarad* (*What's Happening in the Provinces?*) to the farmer's program *Kesht-e Khob, Haasil e Khob* (*Good Planting, Good Production*).

Along with compact discs, Tanin packages the most popular newspapers and magazines from which broadcasters often read news to listeners. The Tanin packets, distributed through a network of taxi drivers, expanded from weekly to daily distribution by March 2004. By the fall, 41 stations were receiving Tanin programming, up from 16 original recipients (mostly RA regional stations) in February 2003.

Although independent and internationally financed centers produce Tanin programming, many state stations have been ready to take it. Given the shortage of quality broadcast material and lack of experienced and motivated personnel, the stations regard Tanin as a useful source of programming to fill airtime, regardless of content. When surveyed by Internews about programming used from Tanin compact discs, the standard response was, "We just put in the CD and play everything."<sup>17</sup>

Salaam Watandar (Hello Nation), the first national real-time programming by Internews, went on the air in June 2004 with 90-minute morning and evening broadcasts of news and entertainment. Local stations receive the show through standard digital television satellite decoders and rebroadcast it over local transmitters. Salaam Watandar employs

<sup>14</sup> USAID/OTI Media Grants in Afghanistan, October 2001–May 2004, Grant No. INT002.

<sup>15</sup> Grant No. IOMAFG012.

<sup>16</sup> Grant No. IOMAFG042.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Internews managers in Kabul, September 2004. In each packet of Tanin materials, Internews includes a feedback sheet for station managers to offer their opinions of the programming.

**In addition to producing useful news and information, Salaam Watandar and Tanin offer community stations a base of programming with which to build an audience as they grow and develop their own local production and reporting capacity.**

a network of local journalists who report on events in their areas and often contribute reporting to local community stations. In providing a better paying outlet for local journalists, Salaam Watandar helps build capacity of local stations.

Internews claims that Salaam Watandar is being broadcast over as many as 29 local community stations and by three regional state broadcasters in October 2004. Although there are no accurate population and audience surveys, Internews estimates that at least 47 percent of the population can hear Salaam Watandar on a local FM station.

While the physical coverage area of the FM transmitters is not great, they reach a proportionally larger portion of the population because they are generally located in regional population centers. Salaam Watandar is also carried on shortwave across the country and around the region. Currently, Salaam Watandar includes *Ba Khabar*, which also is distributed via Tanin. In coming months, Internews plans to expand the Salaam Watandar feed to five and even eight hours of daily programming. In addition to producing useful news and information, Salaam Watandar and Tanin offer community stations—particularly new stations—a base of programming with which to build an audience as they grow and develop their own local production and reporting capacity.

An important factor not addressed in detail is OTI's support to other media development projects providing valuable assistance to local radio stations. OTI supported the creation of an independent news agency under the direction of the IWPR that provides ready-to-read ("rip-and-read") copy for *Ba Khabar* and other clients. AINA produces programming for Tanin, performs journalism training throughout the country, and runs media centers in eight cities, where it provides training for local journalists, a forum for discussion, and access to national papers and the internet.

OTI also partially funds a program that is trying to bring professional journalism training to university faculties around the country. The program, run by the NGO Sayara, has established student radio stations in Herat and Kabul. Students provide eager volunteers for cash-strapped local radio stations.

Internews and OTI are hoping to add an AM component to the community network through donations of AM transmitters; assistance in establishing separate, regional, or provincial community radios; and the leveraging of wavelength on state-owned AM transmitters. This would serve a dual purpose: expanding the Salaam Watandar and local community radio signal and providing stations in remote, under-developed areas with larger audiences, potential revenues, and revenues from

national advertising contracts. The hope is that some transmitters, which cost approximately \$370,000 each, would be provided by Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), using funds from the military's Commanders' Emergency Response Program. Internews plans to fund training and a proportion of operating costs for a limited period for the supplemental AM network.

While an AM station may expand the audience for central and regional programming and serve a wider community base, it may prove too much of a burden for new community stations to bear. An AM station requires larger technical staff, skills, and operational costs. AM transmitters consume more power, fuel, and money. In addition, providing news and information on a regional or provincial scale requires stations to invest in more reporters, training, equipment, and transport. AM transmitters could also prove a major distraction for already overworked directors. For new AM stations to work, they will require more direct assistance and training from Internews than the FM stations. Barring this extra support and assistance, the AM stations may prove unsustainable.

## **Assessing the Performance of Internews-Supported Community Stations**

Of 15 stations participating in the Internews program during the assessment period, the team visited eight, interviewed a reporter and owner of another, and discussed the performance of some others with Internews and unaffiliated Afghan journalists.

An objective assessment was difficult because Afghanistan has yet to develop the capacity for indigenous professional polling organizations and sociological research. There is no reliable data for audience share beyond such anecdotal evidence as interviews on the street and noting stations being listened to by taxicab drivers.<sup>18</sup> There was no effective monitoring of local independent radio stations until August 2004, when AINA began a limited national radio monitoring project sponsored by OTI. Further, only three stations had been on the air for as long as a year. The fledgling stations cannot be judged by the same standards as, for instance, commercial or NGO startups in postcommunist states in eastern and southeastern Europe, given the brand new media sector, the undeveloped media and business environment, and general economic conditions in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, there are criteria by which performance can be better understood, if not quantitatively assessed. The stations have achieved success in the short term to the extent that they

- provide accurate, reliable information to their communities
- contribute to the creation of a local media market
- contribute to the development of civil society as a sounding board for independent voices in their communities

<sup>18</sup> This method is even more unreliable in Kabul, where Arman FM has a promotion in which an anonymous Arman DJ on the street randomly selects a taxicab. If the driver is listening to Arman, he immediately wins 1,000 afghanis (approximately \$23). As a result, a driver who spots a potential customer is likely to turn his radio dial to Arman FM.

Longer-term success would entail developing a local reporting capacity and securing financial sustainability through advertising or other revenues sources.

With the exception of RKK,<sup>19</sup> all stations visited stated that they enjoyed 70–100 percent audience share in their communities. Though there is no way to confirm these claims, an easily tunable FM channel with local news, information, and an attractive popular music playlist could secure a large share of the audience in many smaller communities.<sup>20</sup>

In larger media markets such as Mazar e Sharif and Kabul, stations face greater local competition; their operation more resembles that of stations in more developed countries. Large blocks of music are interspersed with advertising and PSAs, and news and public affairs programs are produced locally or through Salaam Watandar or Tanin.

But in smaller communities that have never enjoyed true local media, community radios—albeit less sophisticated—appear to be more popular and possibly more influential. They may offer local news, religious educational programming, and “people’s voices” programs—reporters conducting vox populi interviews that allow ordinary people to express their opinions about community issues.

<sup>19</sup> RKK shares approximately 80 percent of the market with Arman FM. In a November 2003 Internews survey, RKK—on air since August—enjoyed 18 percent of the market. Arman FM, on air since March, had about 63 percent audience share.

<sup>20</sup> This is particularly true when there is no competition from popular BBC programs on shortwave, though anecdotal evidence suggests that, regardless of program content, Afghans prefer the better quality signals of FM stations to shortwave or AM stations.

For instance, Radio Milli Paygham in Logar Province discovered through man-on-the-street interviews that the lack of reliable public transportation to markets in Kabul was a major problem for local tradesmen and farmers. The station’s reporters embarked on an on-air odyssey that discovered the provincial minister responsible. They were told that the authorities would organize more buses for commuters to Kabul. Whether the province follows through remains to be seen, but it was almost certainly the first instance in the province of local media holding government accountable and giving voice to the concerns of ordinary people. Similar groundbreaking episodes have occurred in other remote, impoverished areas of Afghanistan through the community radio project.

Also in Kandahar, Azad Afghan Radio acts as a watchdog and advocate on local issues, such as the electric power supply, the availability of drinking water, and the performance of the municipal administration. In the words of one Kandahar journalist, “Many of the local bureaucrats fear us because we can expose their corruption, which will at least tarnish their image and standing in the local community.”

In some remote regions, the stations play an important social role. Local radios carry free announcements of community meetings and sporting events. Paid announcements for important family events provide a useful source of income for the stations and a valuable community service. For example, an announcement costing 100–200 afghanis (\$2–\$4) saves a family the time and expense of traveling around the countryside on

foot or donkey to inform relatives of a funeral or wedding.

The community stations also carry public announcements on health and welfare programs, as well as targeted election information. A promotion on Mazar e Sharif's Rabia e Balkhi calling for increased voter registration for women resulted in 500 women turning up in front of the station before going to register en masse in early 2004.

Most residents interviewed appeared to feel that their local radio stations were catering to important needs, and they did not want them to go off the air. The large amount of mail the stations receive provides one measure of the audience's engagement and keen interest. While no formal audit is available, stations claim that 100–400 letters arrive every week with community news announcements, song requests,<sup>21</sup> poems, and complaints about local officials or government. The station manager in Bamiyan claimed the station received five or six walk-in visitors a day who come to read poems or make announcements.

The stations' impact on civil society varies widely, depending on the interest of the management and the degree to which they air independent voices and challenge local authorities. Though—as in Logar and Kandahar—radio can help bring a degree of accountability to local government, all stations report exercising extensive self-censorship in their coverage of political issues, particularly

when the local warlord or authority figure is involved.<sup>22</sup> The radio stations are well aware that there are lines they cannot cross, such as probing the business ventures or unflattering histories of prominent Mujahedin commanders or President Karzai's relatives.

Stations such as Naw e Bahar in Balkh City say that their local programming is more circumspect, but national programming from Salaam Watandar and Tanin can be more daring, criticizing warlords and corrupt commanders and politicians. The fact that the broadcast comes from Kabul—rather than local reporters—gives station directors some protection from the wrath of local bosses.

In Herat and Mazar e Sharif, women's stations Sahar and Rabia e Balkhi avoid controversial discussion of local political disputes, focusing instead on women's and family issues. Mubeena Khyrandesh, director of Rabia e Balkhi, stated:

People expect us to broadcast a lot of politics. But if we acted freely for one day, our office would be closed down. We're trying to help women deal with their difficult family problems, their kids that are out of control. If we just tell her, 'You know, a woman can be president,' we will be criticized and get in

trouble. And what good will that do these women?

Station directors and employees admit that the security situation and general lack of rule of law circumscribe their reports, but they assert that their programs on social and family problems or the rights of the individual under the constitution contribute to the growth of civil society and a slow, but steady, process of democratization.

There are rare, small victories for media freedom. One such case involved Radio Qarabagh, a community station supported by the Qarabagh local council (or shura). The mayor of Kabul complained after the station carried letters from listeners accusing him of misusing a celebration of teacher's day to make a political speech on the glories of the Mujahedin. When the mayor demanded to review all such critical letters before they went on the air, the station refused. He took the case to the shura, which backed up the refusal.<sup>23</sup>

Not all stations have been equally dedicated to covering local news and public affairs or promoting civil society. Afghan journalists and Internews have been disappointed in the performance of Radio Tiraj e Mir in Pul e Khumri, which has failed to expand its programming much beyond Salaam Watandar and music shows. As one Afghan from the town described it, "Tiraj e Mir is treated by the local commanders like their personal jukebox. They send their men around to make requests for their favorite songs for their boys to dance to." Tiraj e Mir has

21 Letters are the most popular method of transmitting requests and information to the stations. Afghanistan has only one telephone line per 1,000 inhabitants (UNDP *Human Development Report 2002*). Outside larger cities there is no cellular service.

22 For more information on the intimidation of journalists, see "'Killing You Is a Very Easy Thing for Us': Human Rights Abuses in Southeast Afghanistan," *Human Rights Watch Report* July 2003: 59–67; *Internews Newsletter on Freedom of Journalism in Afghanistan*, Issue 1, August 2004 <[www.internews.org/publications/afghan\\_news\\_free\\_01.html](http://www.internews.org/publications/afghan_news_free_01.html)>; *Internews Media Monitor: Media Freedom and Journalist Security*, February 29, 2004 <[www.internews.org/publications/Afghan\\_Media\\_Monitor\\_3.pdf](http://www.internews.org/publications/Afghan_Media_Monitor_3.pdf)>.

23 *Internews Newsletter on Freedom of Journalism in Afghanistan*, Issue 1, August 2004 <[www.internews.org/publications/afghan\\_news\\_free\\_01.html](http://www.internews.org/publications/afghan_news_free_01.html)>.



**Given prevailing difficulties in Afghanistan, the Internews network has made remarkable strides.**

also failed to provide any local programming in the Pashto language.

In Jalalabad, where deep and violent divisions between rival warlords and militia commanders prevail, Radio Sharq avoided an ambitious news reporting program and chose to seek profitability with a mix of music apparently agreeable to everyone. While the station has served as an advertising platform for the owner's business ventures,<sup>24</sup> Internews says the owner has been generous in running local PSAs from NGOs for free, when he could have charged for the airtime.

**The Internews Community Radio Project: An Overview**

By the standards of the developed world, including Eastern Europe in the aftermath of communist rule, the quality of the news reporting and production in Afghanistan is extremely low. Programming bears a greater resemblance to the early days of local access cable TV shows than to anything Americans or Europeans would recognize as commercial or public radio.

Even so, given prevailing difficulties in Afghanistan, the Internews network has made remarkable strides. Where two years ago there was nothing but inter-

national broadcasters on shortwave and a creaky series of regional state affiliates, now there is a genuine network: more than 25 stations carry a national programming feed of independent news and information and give local communities a voice for the first time. Given the illiteracy rate, community radio represents a new dimension in public life, opening up dialogue and raising civic awareness. For the first time, the nonreader has access to new ideas and solutions for problems facing his or her family, farm, and community.

Some stations are stronger and more independent than others. Some may take on local officials, while others are content for the moment to discuss social problems affecting their listeners. None of this will shake the foundations of local, regional, or national power structures in the short term. But the network is a historic first step—potentially the first of many on the road to genuine democracy. This has to be seen as an extraordinary achievement.

A comment from a radio director puts the project in perspective. Mohammed Nabi Hamda runs Radio Naw e Bahar in Balkh City, a community that reached its apex before the arrival of Alexander the Great and has been on a downward slide since the arrival of Genghis Khan. "You have to understand," he said, "this is the first independent radio in Balkh in 3,000 years."

**Prospects for Community Radio Sustainability**

A priority for Internews from the beginning was to build self-sufficiency and sustainability into the community radio network. While European and U.S. media development actors argued about balancing commercial sustainability with editorial quality, OTI and Internews representatives in Afghanistan believed that community media that promotes civil society and democratic values could be remain true to these ideals while earning a profit. This was OTI's experience in extremely underdeveloped environments in sub-Saharan Africa, where local radios providing a variety of community services could turn a profit.

In the selection of stations, Internews gave priority to would-be directors who seemed to have the motivation and skills to make the station work as a business. "We try to identify people who can hold these things together when the money runs out," said George Papagiannis, the Internews director of radio operations and training. The importance of viewing the stations and the network as businesses from the inception—rather than simply as media outlets or NGOs—cannot be overemphasized. After years of painful and expensive lessons elsewhere, OTI and Internews appear to have learned that financial viability of media enterprises is as important as their content and role in building civil society. In the Balkans, USAID and other intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and NGOs pumped millions of dollars into a wide array of media with little or no consideration to their financial viability once the money ran out. When

<sup>24</sup> One such venture was *Black Poison*, Afghanistan's first feature action film in at least 20 years, written, produced, directed by, and starring Engineer Shaiq.

the funding expired, so did the newly created media.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the plan in Afghanistan has been to push the media “out of the nest” as soon as possible. Salaam Watandar went on the air at the end of June 2004, and already Internews is trying to put it on the block for a possible merger with other production operations.

The financial structure of the network works essentially from the top down. While local stations are encouraged to generate as much local advertising revenue as possible, approximately 60 percent of income comes from payments from Salaam Watandar in Kabul. As a national program, Salaam Watandar and Internews negotiate a national ad “buy” with private advertisers, IGOs, and NGOs. Then, based on their respective market size, the ad revenues are shared out between the stations. According to John West of Internews, larger stations earn between \$1,000 and \$1,500 per month, while smaller stations average around \$400.

The future of Salaam Watandar and the network is unclear. There are proposals to transform Salaam Watandar into a purely Afghan organization called Nye, which would take over the management of the community radio network. No plan has been agreed upon, but the

most likely one is for the network to operate on a modified top-down model. This would mean that central programming is distributed to local stations and revenue from national advertising shared out, and some regional and local programming uploaded to Kabul would be incorporated into the national program stream.

Given that OTI and other donors have contributed to the creation of no fewer than four radio production units,<sup>26</sup> discussions are underway on how to manage the inevitable “shakeout” of the radio sector. The merger of Nye with Radio Killid as the flagship station of the network is one possibility, along with the incorporation of the AİNA unit. In another scenario, GMA could leave RTA and move to Killid or Nye. There was also some (so far unfounded) speculation that Radio Arman might also be interested in acquiring GMA’s production unit.

How any consolidation of the fledgling sector will evolve remains to be seen. OTI is playing an active role in explaining the “facts of life” to aid recipients, making clear that funding will not last forever, and they must think about how to keep their projects going on their own or be prepared to sell out to the competition.

Internews and OTI base their calculations on the assumption that radio will maintain an effective monopoly on national information networks for at least the next five years. The assumption is that the international donor community

and attendant IGOs and NGOs will continue to operate and fund projects in the country for the foreseeable future and continue to pay for PSAs promoting their projects.

OTI and Internews estimate that national PSA advertising revenue soon will account for 60–70 percent of stations’ revenues.<sup>27</sup> Local advertising will account for 30 percent. This includes paid requests for songs to be played on air—an important revenue source, particularly for smaller stations. The stations charge a few afghanis for a special envelope that is deposited in request boxes around town. In some cases, the boxes attract so much traffic that merchants are willing to pay stations to put them in their stores. Approximately 10–15 percent of the 30 percent local income comes from letters and 30–35 percent comes from classified advertising.

Prospects for national commercial advertising are limited, particularly outside major cities. An advertising culture is only now beginning to emerge, as businesses and media realize the potential for increased income. This culture will grow more quickly in cities than in rural areas.

Currently, the largest national private advertisers are the two mobile phone companies—AWCC and Roshan. But other potential national advertisers are not rushing to move into the country. While Afghanistan has over 20 million inhabitants—a potentially valuable

25 In Kosovo, USAID funded the setup of two private national TV broadcasters in 2000. Four years later, both are still dependent on U.S. assistance, produce substandard programming, and have no business plan relating to operating without donations. By contrast, Radio Television Kosova, the public broadcaster, was forced to adopt effective business practices when European donor funding ran out. Today, Radio Television Kosova operates more like a private business than the two “private” stations. See USAID and AIRD, *Kosovo Media Assessment: Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: USAID, 2004) <[www.dec.org/pdf\\_docs/PNACX726.pdf](http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNACX726.pdf)>.

26 The four are Salaam Watandar, AİNA’s production unit, Good Morning Afghanistan, and Radio Arman FM.

27 While the emphasis on IGO and NGO advertising might appear to be merely replacing one form of international subsidy with another, it is important to remember that OTI and Internews are not just creating media: they are creating a market and a business model that have never existed in Afghanistan.

market—most have no money to spend on anything beyond basic necessities. Without any disposable income, Afghans are not important targets for big advertisers. For the next few years at least, media will be dependent mainly on advertising from international donors.

Of the 15 stations on air, Internews reported that as many as six were self-sufficient, meeting overhead costs through advertising and other revenue. On closer examination, it appeared that only three were actually functioning without any direct support from Internews or NGOs such as IMPACS or ACS. Nevertheless, the amount of financial assistance to the stations after the initial investment in infrastructure was modest—a maximum of \$1,800 per month per station—especially when compared to other development initiatives. In some cases, the aid was far less. Radio Rabia e Balkhi, for instance, stated it was receiving only \$500 a month from IMPACS and \$50 a month from Internews.

However, it is difficult to assess the true financial status of the stations. Some are likely to exaggerate their success to impress visitors and donors, while others claim poverty in hopes of continuing subsidies from Internews. In an all-cash market, it is next to impossible to verify a station's books.

As in any media and business market, the survival of the community radio stations will depend primarily on the initiative and business savvy of their directors and managers. The business performance of the stations varies widely. For example, Radio Azad in Kandahar, controlled by the NGO ACS, has excellent news and public information programming, quality

music programming, and an estimated 74 percent of the potential audience in a major Afghan business center. Regrettably, the station has not taken advantage of its market, earning no more than \$500 a month in advertising. At the same time, it has the highest running costs—\$7,000 per month—of any station, mostly because of its well-paid team of journalists. The problem, say the journalists, is not that they are paid too much, but rather that the NGO official in charge of the station has no experience in either business or media management.

By contrast, Radio Naw e Bahar in Balkh City carries Salaam Watandar, Tanin programming, and limited local news and community information. Balkh has limited advertising market potential; most area businesses are small traders and farmers. Nevertheless, the station's new advertising manager went round to businesses in the province and nearby Mazar during his first week and earned the station \$1,500. But in Ghorriyan, Radio Nadaye Sulhe cannot earn more than \$100 a month, even with 100 percent of the audience share and strong public support from its audience of small businessmen and subsistence farmers. And Milli e Paygham in Logar Province earns only \$250 a month by selling ads to merchants in the local bazaar.

One of the major costs of broadcasting is the rising cost of fuel for generators, essential in a country where only 4 percent of houses have electricity. In Ghorriyan and Balkh, stations had to cut back on broadcasts because of fuel costs. In response, Internews has begun providing stations with solar panels

and batteries to power transmitters and studios. To generate other sources of revenue, Internews is also considering supplying stations with VSAT systems that can also provide a feed to fee-charging internet cafés.

While stations in larger markets may be able to cover their costs, smaller stations in more remote areas will continue to be dependent on the Salaam Watandar advertising feed and donations from Internews and other organizations. When the money runs out, some stations will be forced to cut costs or shut down. Internews managers said they would consider the network a success if 60 percent of the stations were still on the air after two years.

## Support for Commercial Media

### Radio Arman FM

In March 2003, Radio Arman FM went on the air in Kabul as Afghanistan's first independent commercial radio station. Radio Arman, owned by a consortium of Afghan-Australian businessmen, received a grant of \$229,000 from OTI to cover initial capital costs. The purpose of assistance was "to support the establishment of independent and private radio broadcasting in Afghanistan; the creation of a working model for future entrepreneurial development in the sector; broadcast of predevelopment and prosocial messages to the youth and citizens of Kabul; and broadcast of independent and responsible news and public affairs programming."<sup>28</sup>

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28 USAID/OTI Media Grants in Afghanistan, October 2001–May 2004, Grant No. RON047.

## **Radio Arman demonstrates the transformative power of entrepreneurship in developing countries.**

The goal was to create a station that would break RA's monopoly in the minds of the people and the government and begin to create a market for broadcast advertising. Given that the owners, the Mohseni brothers, had good connections with the Afghan Government and the Karzai administration, OTI saw Radio Arman as a foot in the door for private-sector broadcasting.

In early 2004, OTI granted Radio Arman an additional \$421,000 to build a repeater network in Balkh, Nangarhar, Herat, Kandahar, and Ghazni provinces to carry its program stream across the country. In September, the station began test broadcasting from a repeater in Balkh province.

Radio Arman's grants came with no strings attached, other than minimal requirements set out in agreements. Radio Arman is not obliged to play Sa-laam Watandar or any other programming created by Internews, AINA, or other production units funded by OTI. If Radio Arman's owners choose to sell off their assets and return to Australia, there is nothing to prevent them doing so, whereas Internews retains ownership of the equipment of the community radio network and the right to reclaim it, should a station violate its agreement.

### **Assessing the Performance of Radio Arman FM**

Radio Arman FM proved to be an overnight success with its playlist of Hindi, Iranian, Afghan, and even Western pop music; lonely hearts shows; and sports features. It quickly earned more than 60 percent of the estimated audience share and receives thousands of letters each month. When the station attempted to do a call-in promotion, the volume of calls crashed the mobile phone network. During its first six months, when Radio Arman was the only private broadcaster in Kabul, it single-handedly created its broadcast advertising market. Even after the birth of Radio Killid in August 2004, Radio Arman continued to garner as much as 63 percent audience share in Kabul, according to anecdotal Internews surveys.

Radio Arman says it is turning a profit, which is easy to believe, given its dominant role in Kabul's media market. Even so, there are indications that the Mohseni brothers' business management model may not be as successful as they claim. With only one advertising and sales executive on staff, it is uncertain that the station is capable of taking advantage of potential revenues or can handle expansion to a national network and television. Nevertheless, the generosity of OTI's grants and Radio Arman's track record indicate the station has a promising commercial future.

While Radio Arman's format and commercial strategy seem to have been successful, the same cannot be said for its news and public affairs programming. Despite the pledge in its grant, Radio Arman has provided only a bare minimum of news and public affairs—three to five minutes of news at the top of each hour. The compact discs the station provided to the assessment team to show off its programming contained no news or public information of any appreciable value. Even the executive in charge of the news department admits that his staff is incapable of producing anything better than short newscasts. To do better, the entire staff would have to be replaced, he said. Radio Arman's idea of promoting national unity appears to be running jingles that inform the audience that Afghanistan is “a beautiful country.”

There are two simple reasons for Radio Arman's failure to create effective news or public affairs capacity: the station was not required to produce a specified amount of programming in its grant, and news programming is rarely profitable. While the Mohsenis express to donors their dedication to free media and public service broadcasting, the evidence suggests that they, like any businessmen, are primarily interested in turning a profit.

Without question, Radio Arman has transformed the media environment in Kabul and around the country much faster and more effectively than any number of commercial-NGO hybrids could have. The station also demonstrates the transformative power of entrepreneurship in developing countries. Despite its failure to produce quality



news and public affairs programming, Radio Arman has achieved the primary goal set out in its grant, and one can consider the money well spent.

However, the planned expansion of Radio Arman through national repeaters does not appear to bear much benefit for the public and is likely to threaten the competitive position of the OTI-funded Internews network. Radio Arman is not required to provide any additional news or public affairs programming on its national feed than on its local broadcast, and the station apparently has no plans to do so. At the same time, the broadcasts will inevitably cut into the audience share and national advertising fees of the local community and commercial stations in the Internews network. This powerful competition will come at an early stage of the community stations' financial and professional development. The team could find no explanation from USAID to justify the use of U.S. public monies to subsidize a project that brings no appreciable benefit to Afghans, in terms of news or information, and actively undermines other U.S.-funded projects of demonstrably greater social and political value.

OTI representatives in Kabul attempted to justify the support for Radio Arman's expansion as a way of bringing "greater choice" to the market, a characteristic they say is an important component of civil society and democracy. Choice or pluralism, according to the OTI mission, will have a transformative effect on Afghan society.

This argument is unconvincing on a number of levels. Radio Arman is pro-

viding a choice of music—not a range of ideas, opinions, and information that could promote the growth of civil society. Moreover, Afghans already have access to a myriad of music via shortwave broadcasts, compact discs, and cassette tapes. If there is anything in abundant supply in Afghanistan, it is Hindi pop music. Given that a full-scale Soviet occupation and 23 years of war have not had a significant impact on the country's traditional Islamic culture and society, it is unlikely that Hindi pop music and call-in shows will crack the code.

### Support for Tolo TV

OTI is also providing approximately \$2.12 million to help the Mohseni brothers launch Tolo TV, an independent commercial television station in Kabul.<sup>29</sup> The purpose is to repeat the success of Radio Arman in opening the door to private television broadcasting in Afghanistan. Tolo's test programming has been on the air in Kabul since October 7, 2004. Given Radio Arman's success, there is reason to expect that Tolo TV will have a similar effect on a nascent television business market.

Considering the proportionally more expensive capital investment required to start a television station, the larger level of assistance from OTI is understandable. Nevertheless, the authors believe that OTI could have demanded more from the Mohseni brothers in return for U.S. funding. Simply requiring a specified block of news and public affairs programming would have required the owners to invest in developing a

real production unit and training and employing broadcast journalists, editors, and directors capable of producing more than news bites.

OTI has failed to require specific programming deliverables from the Mohsenis in any of the \$2.76 million in grants provided thus far.<sup>30</sup> Instead, the grants refer only an undertaking to run one PSA of the station's choosing per hour and vague commitments to support media freedom and education.

It is somewhat encouraging that Tolo has exceeded OTI's minimal demands and produces a 12-minute newscast in Dari and Pashto. Tolo also has produced roundtable discussions on topics such as suicide bombings, the rights of women under Islam, and democracy in Afghanistan; and has carried in-depth interviews with the head of the Women's Business Development Center, the national security advisor, the head of the Central Bank, and the reconstruction minister.

One of the more puzzling parts of the Tolo grant is the provision for a new foundation intended to "enhance the social, economic, cultural, technological, and artistic foundations of Afghanistan."<sup>31</sup> Tolo's owners are obliged to contribute a minimum of \$50,000 a year to the foundation, which will have a local board. Under government regulations, neither OTI nor the U.S. Government will have a voice on the foundation board. Moreover, after the completion of the grant in June 2005,

29 USAID/OTI Media Grants in Afghanistan October 2001–May 2004, Grant Nos. IOMAFG087, 091, 092, 093, 094, 095, 108, and 109.

30 USAID/OTI Media Grants in Afghanistan, October 2001–May 2004; Grant Nos. RON47, IOMKBL120 and IOMAFG087, 091, 092, 093, 094, 095, 108, and 109.

31 IOM Grant Agreement Description, Grant No. IOMAFG087, Section I.

OTI apparently will have no way to enforce the provisions of the agreement.

## Problems and Challenges

- According to Internews representatives, one of the biggest operational obstacles is the physical isolation and difficult business environment of some remote stations. In Ghor Province, roads are so poor that traveling a couple of hundred miles to deliver Tanin programming can take several days. Some subsistence-farming communities lack money for basic needs, much less advertising or song requests. In such communities, the prospects are limited for a self-sustaining station, even one with an all-volunteer staff.
- Internews and other journalism training organizations stated that the level of literacy and education in Afghanistan is so low that students often need basic language, writing, and mathematics education before starting journalism training courses.
- One threat to the community radio stations in the larger provincial cities is of OTI's own making. In funding the planned expansion of Radio Arman FM to the provinces, OTI is effectively subsidizing competition by a purely commercial enterprise that has no interest or obligation to provide anything more than minimal news and public information programming. The stations in the large provincial markets say they are concerned that Radio Arman will cut into their audience and advertising base.
- One of the greatest obstacles arose from the structure of a grant from OTI, not from conditions on the ground. Internews currently handles the negotiation of national advertising contracts for the Salaam Watan-dar initiative. Money from advertisers is transferred to an Internews account and disbursed to the stations on a monthly basis. Unfortunately, the language of the OTI grant prevents Internews from taking in additional funds as a result of its projects. Any additional income is required to be deducted from the total grant. So when Internews makes a deal with an advertiser, the money has to be structured as a "grant" rather than advertising income for the project. In the future, OTI should structure grants to allow implementing partners to handle advertising income on behalf of their clients without jeopardizing the partners' grant funding.
- Another challenge some stations have faced has been the well-intentioned but problematic involvement of the provincial reconstruction teams or PRTs. The PRTs are controlled by the U.S. Department of Defense, and include military civil affairs units and USAID advisers. The PRTs have often tended to look on local media as a useful tool to convey public affairs and psychological operations messages on such subjects as poppy eradication and counterterrorism. The PRTs have been willing to contribute large amounts of money to local stations in return for coverage, or simply out of goodwill.

Such generosity can bring unintended negative effects. In Herat, the PRT gave Radio Sahar, the small women's station, a gift of \$10,000, an amount

equal to nearly a year's operating costs. The station quickly disintegrated as rival managers fought over who would handle the money and the local governor, Ismail Khan, attempted to take control of the newly wealthy station. IMPACS and Internews were forced to become involved to resolve the management issues and return the money to the PRT. The station was reorganized and relaunched after being off the air for some time. In another instance, a PRT in Khost offered to pay for housing for the local station in exchange for carrying PRT information products. The station refused, on the advice of Internews.

Internews and OTI have sought to explain to the PRTs, the military, and the U.S. Embassy that the radio stations are meant to be purely independent entities, not purveyors of U.S. Government messages, such as VOA or Radio Azadi.

OTI reached an understanding with the PRTs by the fall of 2004 and expects them to donate AM transmitters for Internews to expand its community radio network. Confusion may still arise over time, with the regular turnover in PRT staff. In addition, OTI is currently handing off its responsibilities to USAID's DG Office, which will inherit the relationships with the PRTs. Current agreements may have to be revisited, and OTI will need to educate colleagues from other agencies and departments about its role and the rationale behind its media development programs.

# Impact of USAID Assistance

OTI is not just responsible for the growth of the independent radio sector; it is primarily responsible for the *creation* of the independent radio sector.

In 2002, Afghans were served by a national AM broadcast from Radio Afghanistan and perhaps 18 local AM and FM provincial state broadcasters. They carried the national feed and any local news and information that local

**OTI's goal is not simply to launch media outlets, but to produce sustainable stations and networks that have a reasonable chance of survival without direct international support.**

warlords allowed. There was no private media market with self-sustaining independent stations.

Two years later, there are more than 25 independent local radio stations carrying news and information to more than 43 percent of the population via FM. In Kabul, four production units provide news and information programming for local and national broadcast. Three hours of Salaam Watandar programming reaches most of Afghanistan via shortwave.

Unlike other media development missions in other countries, the OTI-sponsored projects have attempted to make

sustainability and self-sufficiency an underlying premise. The goal is not simply to launch media outlets, but to produce sustainable stations and networks that have a reasonable chance of survival without direct international support. Toward that end, one of OTI's first steps was to help create an advertising market where none existed.

It may be too soon to make a definitive judgment about the performance or sustainability of individual stations or the community network. There are numerous variables, including social, political, security, and financial conditions that affect the future of the stations. What can be assessed is the strategic approach and management of the projects so far. On that count, the team is optimistic.

Unlike some other media development projects, there do not appear to be major systemic problems. Internews and OTI have learned valuable lessons from other countries. The emphasis on community political and financial support, along with built-in benchmarks for sustainability and early self-sufficiency, produces a mindset among station managers that focuses on serving their community audience and building a viable business, rather than simply pleasing foreign donors.

Instead of expensive investments in equipment needed to forge an elaborate centralized structure, the decentralized

nature of the network placed a priority on grassroots impact and relevance. The management and business training provided and the willingness to temporarily fund an advertising or business position at each station are excellent ideas that should help the stations stand on their feet sooner.

Overall, the Internews community and commercial radio initiative is one of the most thorough, well-considered, and well-executed media development programs the team encountered. The authors hope that the Internews experience—particularly its understanding of the importance of financial viability and community-based media—will serve as a model for media projects in other transitional and developing countries.

When the team posed difficult questions and laid out challenging scenarios, it was pleased to find that Internews project managers had already made contin-

network project. Communities have become aware of the possibilities of local media, and the project has begun to produce a cadre of trained or partially trained journalists and managers, some of whom may go on to start other, more successful media projects.

But OTI should have put stricter requirements on the Radio Arman and Tolo TV initiatives. Though their launch represents an innovative and successful approach to cultivating private broadcast markets in developing societies, the grant structure was so problematic that the authors cannot recommend the entire Radio Arman experience as a model. Instead, OTI should develop standardized grant models that build in greater accountability to the larger goals of the media development mission.

OTI appears to have created a series of programs that seem to recognize that sustainability can apply to an entire

**The Internews community and commercial radio initiative is one of the most thorough, well-considered, and well-executed media development programs the team encountered.**

agency plans and anticipated alternative outcomes. Inevitably, some stations will fail as a result of increased competition, poor management, or lack of general business or media savvy. If and when they do, it is not likely to be due to lack of planning or management by OTI or Internews.

Folding some stations would not take away from the positive impact of the

sector or profession, rather than just an individual station. But when stations fold, are bought out, or change their formats, as the market demands, what will remain is the bedrock of any media sector: a cadre of trained journalists, editors, managers, and technicians who are not only ready and able to ply their trade, but can serve as mentors to a future generation of journalists.

## **Lessons and Recommendations**

### **1. Successful media development efforts begin with a solid understanding of the conditions of a particular society and its media sector.**

Standards of journalism may be the same all over the world, but the educational, financial, infrastructural, cultural, and regulatory contexts are different in every country. In a state as underdeveloped as Afghanistan, models from Russia or the Balkans could not be easily transplanted.

U.S. assistance efforts quickly grasped difficulties and characteristics and launched a radio project appropriate to the setting. For instance, the community radio model employed in sub-Saharan Africa proved more relevant and appropriate for Afghanistan than approaches in more developed environments with mature media industries.

### **2. Apart from training and financial viability, media assistance should take into account legal reform from the beginning of development efforts.**

Over the past decade, media development has evolved from simply bringing a few foreign journalists to the United States for tours of media establishments to on-site, intensive training in target countries. After the financial failure of journalistically successful recipients of U.S. funding, assistance efforts recognized that media in transitional societies needed business and management training as much as, if not more than,

journalism training. Then, faced with political interference in licensing and other regulatory obstacles, development organizations began to view reform of media law and regulation as crucial for the survival of independent-minded media.

Perhaps media development professionals often failed to recognize the interconnectedness of these three main elements because most program managers had editorial rather than business or legal backgrounds. In addition, the “NGO mentality” of many partners and donors did not encourage long-term thinking about conditions for viability, as opposed to short-term victories for freedom of speech, ethnic tolerance, or other tactical political goals in support of U.S. policy. Fortunately, OTI and Internews applied some of these important lessons in Afghanistan. The emphasis on financial viability built into the community radio project and other activities is encouraging, and appears to have already achieved partial success.

Unfortunately, the third pillar of successful media development—a legal enabling environment—has been almost entirely neglected, potentially at great cost. Despite the approximately \$15 million invested in the development of free and independent media in Afghanistan, little has been done to create a legal and regulatory environment that protects that investment. There has been only a minimal improvement in Afghanistan’s media law.

In November 2004, the Ministry of Culture Information, on orders from the Supreme Court, ordered the closure of

all cable television broadcasters because the stations had aired “un-Islamic” “Bollywood” movies. OTI-client Tolo TV was also sanctioned, and the Mohsenis complained to the president. After the complaint, President Karzai swiftly moved to reverse the ministry’s decision.

For the sake of free speech in Afghanistan and the enterprising media organizations that have received U.S. assistance, USAID should make the reform of media legislation a top priority. This effort should promote the creation of an independent FCC-type body to regulate broadcast licensing and international principles for programming. As an initial goal, legal reform efforts should seek to cancel provisions that require print media to obtain licenses, and libel and slander should be decriminalized. Professional associations for lawyers and journalists focusing on media freedom could also be encouraged.

OTI made the argument that such legal, regulatory, and perhaps constitutional reform is beyond its mandate and more rightly the responsibility of USAID’s DG Office. Given the elaborate and admirable media assistance work underway in Afghanistan, ignoring legal reform seems to pose an unacceptable risk.

OTI’s window of activity in transitional societies is now two to four years. Within that window, legal and regulatory reforms are often the easiest to bring about and implant in a nascent democratic culture. From the beginning of its mission, OTI should make it a priority to work with journalists, lawyers, community leaders, and the government to reform media regulations and licensing

rules for broadcasters and create a legal regime that enshrines and protects independent and responsible media.

The current legal structure presents a threat to the media’s independence and long-term health. Such a reform program fits in well with media development and democratization goals. OTI could use its considerable financial leverage to persuade government ministries to work cooperatively on media law initiatives. The U.S. Embassy could reinforce such an effort and ensure media law reform receives a political priority.

To ensure free and fair elections, U.S. Government agencies should also insist that a media protection provision be included in election rules in Afghanistan and similar settings. Such a provision—setting out investigative and enforcement authority to counter threats to media freedom—could be drafted by the host government or international organizations.

In former Yugoslavia, one of the greatest protections for independent media coverage of electoral campaigns and subsequent political events was the protection afforded by clear and consistently enforced sanctions on intimidation, threats, and attacks on the media. It is deeply disappointing that the UN has not only failed to create such provisions in Afghanistan, but has actively opposed them.

USAID funded the creation of an electoral media commission to regulate the behavior of the media during the election campaign, but it did not insist on a similar body to investigate and sanction



**Future grants should include clearly defined requirements for news and information programming, with real consequences if the requirements are not met.**

threats and intimidation against the media by political actors and their supporters.<sup>32</sup>

**3. Reconsider the terms of direct grants to commercial media ventures.**

The experience of Radio Arman FM shows that providing support to purely commercial media can build up media and business markets more swiftly than NGO or community media. That said, such commercial outlets in an unregulated environment can prove counterproductive to the overall goals of the media development mission. Large commercial projects can vacuum up available advertising revenue in their quest to dominate the market, possibly driving out struggling stations with a stronger editorial mission to inform citizens. News is rarely a profitable broadcast component, and it is never as profitable as pop music.

In an independent media nursery such as Afghanistan, community and public service stations may not be strong enough to go head-to-head immediately against a station like Radio Arman. No one should prevent entrepreneurs from trying to expand and maximize their business ventures, but should USAID subsidize media that perform

an extremely limited public service and threaten other projects? Future grants should include clearly defined requirements for news and information programming, with real consequences if the requirements are not met.

**4. Encourage baseline audience and opinion surveys, as well as media monitoring projects from the outset of assistance efforts.**

Almost all the estimates of broadcast media audience ratings in Afghanistan are based on anecdotal evidence or limited surveys of questionable accuracy and methodology. In any initial media development package, OTI should include funds for studies or capacity building for baseline studies to determine audience share for media outlets and help set program priorities.

Such efforts are now underway. AINA has just started a monitoring unit, and OTI has commissioned a new polling organization that has begun listener-ship surveys in areas covered by the Internews network.

**5. U.S. agencies need to agree and abide by clear guidelines and shared concepts about the intended role of OTI's media development projects.**

In a postwar, high-priority mission such as Afghanistan, there are inevitably pressures on the departments of

State and Defense to produce results via information operations, including products of public affairs and psychological operations. It is only natural for these departments to regard OTI's media development projects as useful and logical platforms for such products and for them to seek to support and exploit those platforms.

However, in an environment such as Afghanistan—where there is suspicion of U.S. intentions and confusion about the roles of military, intelligence, and development agencies—such an approach can put aid recipients at risk and jeopardize the emergence of a robust media sector.

If the goal of media development is to help local media partners evolve into genuinely independent news organizations, U.S. representatives should not simultaneously encourage outlets to rely on military information products or embassy-sponsored campaigns. Media development and public persuasion are distinct, important endeavors that need to be kept separate to be effective. Blurring the distinction has proven counterproductive in other countries and will only undermine the objectives of both.

<sup>32</sup> For the 2005 parliamentary elections, OTI is funding a program to educate political parties and journalists about the rights and responsibilities of journalists in a campaign.

# Appendix I. Programming Provided to Internews Stations<sup>33</sup>

## I. Internews Tanin Programs

*Beware (Baakhabar)*, 15 minutes daily

A current affairs show offering news reports, interviews, and analysis on issues around the country.

*Children's City (Shahrak-e-Atfal)*, 30 minutes weekly

An educational and entertaining program, set in an ideal imagined city, that features an interactive radio, an invisible parrot, and a flying carpet. Through children's adventures, the geography, history, and current affairs of Afghanistan are presented in an engaging manner, while addressing issues of postconflict psychology from a child's perspective. The program is so popular that it is broadcast on television in one town.

*DJ Music Programming (Goft-O-Shonood, Saaz-o-Sorood)*, 30 minutes weekly

The program is presented by a fictional Afghan DJ working in a record shop. He discusses music with a new customer, playing five records interspersed with short informative conversation. A series of six 30-minute programs have been produced, and more are planned.

*Good Planting, Good Production (Kesh-e-Khoob, Haasil-e-Khoob)*, 25 minutes weekly, produced by Internews with ICARDA.

An informative program (currently in the final stages of production) that answers farmers' questions. The prerecorded answers are provided by a fictional old farmer, a wise character who provides detailed and relevant advice. The program is to include messages or announcements, such as information about improved seeds.

*House of Mirrors (Khana-e-Aina)*, 25 minutes weekly

Beginning in February 2005, this show will highlight the works of poets and writers, opinions on new and classic literature, and cultural events.

*A Society of Good Welfare (Jamia-e-Murafah)*, 25 minutes weekly

The announcer reads a section of the constitution and features various opinions about it.

*Sports World (Dunyaaye warzish)*, 20 minutes weekly

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<sup>33</sup> From Internews information sheet.

This production features sports news, analysis, and interviews with sports stars.

*Towards the Voting Box (Ba Soye Sandoqe Rai)*, 25 minutes weekly

This program offers information on the presidential elections, how to register, and the importance of voter registration.

*What Is My Right? (Haq-e-man Chist?)*, 25 minutes biweekly, produced by Internews with IHRCA.

The program combines drama and debate in order to raise awareness of the rights of men, women, and children. It presents a fictional scene, pausing at the point of conflict to discuss the issues with studio presenters, including lawyers. After the debate, the program plays out two possible conclusions. The first scenario ends unsatisfactorily, but the characters become aware of their rights and the conflict is resolved in the final scene.

## 2. AİNA Productions

*Between Us (Meyan-e-Maa)*, 30 minutes weekly

Focusing on one issue such as the constitution or rehabilitation, this lively prerecorded talk show aims to encourage a dialogue between ordinary Afghans and officials or specialists. The show raises political awareness and connects policymakers to those directly affected by the policies.

*What's Happening in the Provinces (Dar velayaat chi maygozarad)*, 25 minutes weekly.

This program, hosted by an Afghan journalist, focuses on a particular region or city. The format includes a press review, extracts from editorials and articles, and interviews with editors of provincial newspapers and magazines. The program ends with music by and interviews with a local musician.

## 3. Other Tanin Contributors

*Enlightened Future (Fardaye Roshan)*, 12 minutes weekly, produced by PSI

A weekly drama targeting women that concerns health-related issues, house-keeping, and childrearing.

*Message and Understanding (Payam-o-Paywand)*, 30 minutes weekly, produced by the BMC.

A youth entertainment program aimed at a wide audience to promote understanding between young people and other age groups.

*National Unity (Hambastagi Milli)*, weekly, produced by the National Solidarity Project (NSP)

A show that educates listeners about NSP's rural development aid effort to donate funds to villages that decide, by consensus, how best to use the money.

*Today's Concepts (Aashnayi Ba Mafaheem-e-Roze)*, 20 minutes weekly, produced by the National Participation Association.

A talk show about ideas of democracy and civil society.

*Views (Deedgah ha)*, 10 minutes weekly, produced by United Nations Integrated

Regional Information Networks (UN IRIN).

The program presents views of the people on NGOs and reconstruction.

*Women and the Constitution (Zan wa Qanoon-e-Asasi)*, 20 minutes biweekly, produced by IMPACS in partnership with the Afghan Women's Network (AWN).

A 10-minute radio program that explores and explains the constitutional process, focusing on women's participation in the creation of the constitution as well as the effects the constitution may have on the lives of Afghan women and their families.

*Women and Society (Zan wa Jamia)*, 20 minutes biweekly, produced by IMPACS and AWN

A program focusing on the rights and roles of women in Afghanistan today that highlights new services and opportunities for women, such as literacy classes and income-generation projects provided by NGOs. Afghan women talk about their changing lives and their dreams for the future.

*You and the President (Shuma wa Ra'ees-e-Dawlat)*, 18 minutes weekly, produced by the BMC.

A unique format for Afghanistan: journalists gather questions from the public and present them to President Karzai, who answers them during the broadcast.

Tanin also distributes President Karzai's speeches.



# Appendix 2. Brief Assessments of Radio Stations Visited

## **I. Afghan Independent Radio**

*Interviews with Ismail Taimoor and Sarwar Amani*

Initially set up in Kandahar with Afghan expatriate funding in January 2003, Afghan Independent Radio was the first independent community station to go on air. Later on, Internews provided the station with some equipment and technical support. It is a sister organization of the Afghans for Civil Society, a U.S.- and Kandahar-based civil society group organized by Qayyum Karzai, President Karzai's brother.

With a staff of five, the station has high programming standards and won an Internews contest for best programming. Many of the journalists were trained by Sarah Chayse, a former NPR journalist.

In one week, Afghan Independent Radio produces at least 16 different programs of 25–30 minutes each. The station's 13 hours of daily broadcasts include at least four hours of its own programming and some programming from Salam Watandar. The station also relays seven hours of BBC Pashto and Dari programming.

According to an Internews survey in April 2004, 74 percent of Kandahar's population listens to the station, which enjoys the largest local audience. However, station managers were afraid of losing many of their listeners to Radio Arman when that station extended its network to Kandahar.

At \$7,000 a month, the station has the highest running costs among the community radios. Journalists are well paid. However, not more than \$500 a month can be raised from advertisements, despite the station's location in a major city. In addition, attempts to raise money through participants buying tickets to commercial shows have not proved profitable; a recent show brought in only \$50.

The station also faces serious management challenges. The operation is controlled by a close confidante of President Karzai, Engineer Abdullah, who knows little about management, journalism, or radio stations. Many of the staff are not happy with his management style. They felt that an AM transmitter would greatly increase their chances of sustainability, but considered solving management problems as the first priority.

## 2. Bamiyan Radio

*Telephone interviews with Sulaiman Muradee and Ali Erfani*

The station started broadcasting in mid-September 2003. It has about 12 hours of daily broadcasts, including three hours provided by Salam Watandar and plenty of music. Other programs are on women's issues, NGO reconstruction activity, local news, and other subjects. The station apparently faces no political pressure from local authorities.

There have been no surveys conducted to gauge the station's popularity, but Erfani maintained that five or six people turn up every day to read their poems or make announcements.

Although the staff said that the station's income was \$600–1,600, other sources said that it earned \$8,000 a month from advertisements and sale of airtime to NGOs.

The station's major problem is that it is based in a rented compound, but the PRT will soon help it secure its own building.

## 3. Radio Killid Kabul

*Interviews with Aziz Hakimi and Najiba Ayubi*

Radio Killid Kabul (RKK) is the radio component of KMG, a subsidiary organ of DHSA, an Afghan NGO running numerous development projects around the country. The print section of KMG includes a newspaper, *Akhbar-e Killid*, and two weekly magazines, *Mursal* and *Killid*. The group has recently bought a former state-owned daily, *Anis*. Pul Communication and Advertising Agency and Nye Distribution Network

are other parts of this emerging Afghan media conglomerate.

RKK management claims their station is Afghanistan's first private talk-radio station. It was launched on 19 August 2003 (Afghan Independence Day) through a major USAID and Internews grant, with DHSA meeting donor resource input halfway. The station is unique in many ways: it is part of the Internews station network, but more independent and commercial than the other stations.

On the other hand, it is significantly different from the pop-only model of Radio Arman FM. As articulated by its management, the following summarizes the station's major objectives: "The aim of RKK is to serve the citizens of Kabul with programming [that] meets their daily information needs regarding the important political processes underway in Afghanistan, while also providing a source of entertainment and cultural programming [that] fosters moderation, a sense of nationhood, and a respect for pluralism and democracy."

RKK is trying to achieve these goals through a wide variety of programming, including news; talk shows; features; music; and programs on healthcare, children, women, political processes, and sport. The station now has at least 40 hours of original programming every week that mainly caters to traditional Afghan tastes. RKK wants to serve a broad spectrum of society, unlike Radio Arman, which targets youth.

Although the station regularly uses the news component of Internews' programming, it can pick and chose from the rest of Tanin programming. Despite

its limitations, RKK has far more diverse and better programs than Radio Arman. Many independent Afghan journalists felt that RKK has the potential to become the leading Afghan information and entertainment radio station. At the moment, international stations such as BBC, VOA, and RFE/RL hold that distinction, and all are available on FM in Kabul.

In the absence of any credible and accurate listenership surveys, the popular belief in Kabul is that Radio Arman has more listeners than RKK. Depending on who is asked, Killid has 20–40 percent of the listeners, compared to Radio Arman's 60–80 percent.

Despite the diversity of its programming, RKK has a long road ahead to achieve sustainability. The managers say the station needs complete on-the-job journalistic capacity building to meet professional standards and upgrade the station's equipment and work environment. The station seeks to ensure in-depth, accurate coverage of the country's transition and desires a promotional and marketing campaign that substantially widens its audience and builds a solid group of regular advertisers.

In addition to training for journalists, the station urgently needs a realistic business plan. Although the station is generating some revenues through advertisements, a carefully calibrated and implemented business plan might increase revenues significantly.

A major weakness is that KMG currently operates as a traditional NGO. It is almost entirely dependent on donor funding, and most of its publications

are heavily subsidized. (For example, though the printing costs for a single copy of the weekly *Killid* is 12 afghanis, it is sold for 5 afghanis.) KMG is expected to be a major player in the Afghan media scene, both in print and radio. But its sustainability depends on its ability to grow out of the NGO culture and transform itself into a business. To achieve that, USAID should continue to support RKK's business development efforts.

#### **4. Radio Melli Paygham [National Message]**

*Interviews with Noorullah Navid and Muhammad Noori*

The radio station was set up in Muhammad Agha District, Logar Province, by engineer Tariq Usman, in partnership with Internews. Tariq Usman is local social activist and owner of a private educational institute that teaches English-language courses and computer skills.

The station started broadcasting October 2003 with local programming, including local news, sports, literature, Islamic teachings, and advocacy programs on the solution of local problems. It is on air for 10 hours a day, including three hours provided by Salaam Watan-dar. Programming samples provided were average, at best.

According to its own survey in the five districts of Logar, the station has an 85 percent audience share, but no documentation backed up the claim. Some listeners have put antennas on their roofs to improve reception.

The station receives 100–150 letters a day, an indicator of the station's

popularity and a source of significant revenue, since the station earns three afghanis per letter. The station's own envelopes are delivered to letter boxes in specific shops. The station also earns limited revenues from PSAs and about \$250 a month from advertisements, mainly from businesses in the small district bazaar in Muhammad Agha. If salaries are paid to staff, expenses are around \$700 a month. Around a dozen staff members have not been paid for the last four months.

Although Roshan mobile network will soon start working in the region and might offer a few advertisements, the station will need substantial assistance. Its staff said that an AM transmitter could dramatically improve their prospects for sustainability, but the station lacks the capacity to handle such an upgrade.

#### **5. Radio Nadaye Sulha**

*Interviews with Jamshid Nekjoo Azizi, Hafizullah Haqdost, and Shakila Haqdost*

Jamshid Nekjoo Azizi and Hafizullah Haqdost, returnees from Iran, devised their own station in the remote Ghoryan district of Herat Province. They wanted to compete with the growing influence of Iranian TV in the region, where an ordinary antenna permits reception of five Iranian channels.

Their station's transmissions, initially limited to 300 meters, gradually grew to 20 square kms. Although local people supported the initiative, Haqdost, the owner of a small electronics shop, paid most of the \$10,000 invested in the station.

The initiative attracted the attention of Internews, and the station received funding for the initial six months as well as equipment on April 8, 2004. A portion of the original grant remains.

The station offers diverse local programming including news, literary, and folktale features, people's voice shows, and similar items. The programming provided to us had heavily moralistic overtones. Further, the station does not broadcast songs by female singers because of the political atmosphere prevailing under the rule of Ismail Khan, the region's longtime political boss.

According to a recent Internews survey, 100 percent of the Ghoryan population listen to the station. (All respondents contacted for the survey picked the station). Many in the local community said that Radio Ghoryan represented their own voice, was very useful, and should not go off the air.

Radio Ghoryan does not have its own space; it is crammed into two rooms above some shops. All 20 staff members volunteer. The station's major challenge is economic. The local economy is based on subsistence agriculture, and small businesses cannot provide enough advertisements. At best, the station can earn \$100 per month. Following the recent rise in fuel prices, the station was forced to reduce its broadcasts from 10 to 7.5 hours a day.

Azizi and Haqdost felt that an AM transmitter with the right capacity could dramatically increase their chances of sustainability, as the station might reach a bigger audience. The station also needs more equipment—such as digital mini-disc recorders—to increase program-

ming time. It also needs more technical support because of the remoteness of the station. Although some journalists from Ghorayn are being trained at the Internews office in Kabul, the staff needs extensive training sessions.

## **6. Radio Naw e Bahar (New Spring)**

*Interview with Mohammed Nabi Hamdad, station owner and director*

Radio Naw e Bahar went on the air in Balkh city 4 January 2004, broadcasting at 150 watts with a 30-km broadcast radius. In August 2004, it was broadcasting up to eight hours a day of news, music, and public information, including three hours of Salaam Watandar programming. The station produces between seven and eight hours a week of local programming, including news, talk, and music. The remaining airtime is filled with programming supplied by Tanin, of which 40 percent are songs.

Mohammed Nabi Hamdad also claimed a 98 percent audience share within Balkh province. This may be true in Balkh city, but such rates are unlikely in Mazar e Sharif, where the station can barely be heard. Nevertheless, he claims the station receives 150–200 letters a week with musical requests, poems, stories, commentary, and complaints about local and provincial services, bureaucrats, and warlords.

The station owner and director said the station is free to criticize local warlords. It does so through commentary and national programming provided by Tanin and Salaam Watandar, with no apparent retribution so far. He attributes this to his father's prominent political position

in Balkh province and the diminishing strength of the warlords.

Nine people at the station volunteer their services. No salaries have been paid since the Internews six-month salary subsidy expired in June.

Advertising revenues have paid for fuel for the generator that powers the studio and transmitter. The station owner said he was forced to cut back programming in the face of rising fuel costs. The station owner is keen to double the station's transmitter power, which would allow it to reach a larger audience and increase advertising rates.

Internews' support of an advertising manager brought quick benefits. Naw e Bahar's new ad executive brought in \$1,500 in local advertising revenue in his first week on the job.

## **7. Radio Qarabagh**

*Interviews with Merajuddin and Karamuddin Saboor*

With assistance from Internews, Radio Qarabagh started broadcasting after the local shura helped Merajuddin with some initial money and backed him to set up the station.

The station broadcasts for 12 hours daily, including three hours of Salaam Watandar programming. Programming includes local news, religious education, letters, information on elections, healthcare (funded by NGOs such as MSF and ACTED), sports, people's voices, and PSAs. There is room for improvement, achievable through training and exposure.

The station's listening audience is in five districts of Kabul and Parwan provinces.

According to a recent Internews survey, Qarabagh radio station has a 100 percent audience rating. This surpasses the audience share for all international radios, including BBC, VOA, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

The station had its fair share of political problems—local commanders object to programming at times—but such disputes were peacefully resolved and the station continues to broadcast.

The station's staff felt that their major challenge was financial, and said that they would need assistance at least for another three years. Although they were raising some revenue from NGOs and PSAs, they still needed money to meet the rise in fuel prices and pay staff salaries.

## **8. Radio Rabia e Balkhi**

*Interview with Mubeena Khyrandesh*

The station, named after a famed Afghan woman poet, was established March 2003 by local women and IMPACS, a Canadian NGO.

Initially the station broadcast for two hours a day with a low-power transmitter that reached a radius of 4 km, or central Mazar e Sharif. Internews provided a 150-watt transmitter, boosting the station's signal to a 28–30 km radius.

The station broadcasts 60 percent in Dari and 40 percent in Pashto and

Uzbek languages. In August 2004, it broadcast 14 hours a day of news, music, public affairs, and family programming. The station produces 15 independent programs a week; 70 percent relate to women and family issues. These issues range from childcare, cooking, and hygiene to more controversial issues such as forced marriage, domestic violence, divorce, and suicide.

Female reporters gather information on women's problems through interviews with women's worship services every Wednesday at the Imam Ali Shrine in Mazar. Station Director Mubeena Khyrandesh said the station sometimes cannot broadcast direct discussions of women's rights that might provoke local Islamic leaders, but sometimes it can raise issues such as suicide and forced marriage through family dramas.

Despite the emphasis on women's and family issues, Rabia e Balkhi's additional mix of news, sports, music, and talk has garnered the station as much as 60 percent of the radio audience in Mazar, according to the director. Other journalists and residents of Mazar also described the station as the most popular radio among both women and men. Mubeena Khyrandesh claimed the station's five mailboxes bring in as many as 400 letters a week.

Financially, the station claims to have been very successful. In August 2004, the director claimed the station was virtually self-sufficient, receiving only a \$50 per month subsidy from Internews. The station garners local advertising revenue as well as that brought in via Salaam Watandar. Internews is currently paying the salary of an advertising

manager, who has begun to bring in additional advertising revenue.

## **9. Radio Sahar**

*Interviews with Tayyaba Zahidi and Saghar Azimi*

The women's radio station in Herat started broadcasting 28 October 2003. The station has nine people on staff: five in radio and four support staff. Its first director was Holon Khattibi, who heads an NGO working for the improvement of women's lives.

Its seven hours of broadcasts comprise three hours provided by Salaam Watandar and four hours of local programming, including two news bulletins; stories of forced marriages; literacy lessons for women; and programs on health issues, education, suicide, and social issues affecting women. Radio Sahar also broadcast programs on women's role in the elections and women's rights in Islam, along with entertainment, comedy, and music. Many in Herat felt that the programming was mostly focused on moral lessons and that the station could not touch on anything political.

According to the station's surveys (for which no documentary proof was offered), they have 80 percent listenership. The station has five letter boxes around the city and receives many letters and phone calls.

The station is generating some revenues from Roshan and AWCC advertisements, but it is lagging in management and business development. Sustainability is a key question. The station receives \$600 a month from IMPACS to pay rent and salaries, but needs another stu-

dio, an electric power line from the local grid, a digital telephone connection, and computers.

According to sources in Kabul, the station management fell out over a \$10,000 grant from the local PRT, but one in Herat will speak about this. Tayyaba Zahidi, the new manager, took over the day before our visit. The station and its workers have not faced pressures from their families or the authorities.





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**U.S. Agency for International Development**

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20523-1000

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